



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region One
490 North Meridian Rd.
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 752-5501
FAX: 406-257-0349
Ref: JS101-05
November 4, 2005

TO: *Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 201704, Helena, 59620-1704
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
DNRC, PO Box 201601, Helena, 59620-1601; Kalispell: Bob Sandman*
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - Director's Office: Reg Peterson, Parks: Walt Timmerman, Fisheries: Karen Zackheim,
& Legal Unit: Brandi Fisher
*Montana Historical Society, SHPO, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Building, Helena, 59620-1201
*Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
Marcia Pablo, CSKT Historic Preservation Office, PO Box 278, Pablo, MT 59855
Tom McDonald, Div Admin, CSKT Natural Resources, PO Box 278, Pablo, 59855
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59715
Rep. Rick Maedje, PO Box 447, Fortine, MT 59918-0447
Sen. Aubyn Curtiss, PO Box 216, Fortine, MT 59918-0216
Lincoln County Commissioners, 512 California Avenue, Libby, MT 59923
Lincoln County Libraries; PO Box 401, Eureka, 59917; 207 N 3rd, Troy, 59935; & 220 W 6th St, Libby, 59923
Interested Parties

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Region One, has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the purpose of a forest thinning and fuels reduction project in four areas of Thompson Chain of Lakes in Lincoln County.

Based on the analysis in the EA, Alternative 2, to complete the forestry project, was found to be the preferred alternative. There were no changes to the draft EA; therefore, the draft becomes the final EA. A copy of the record of decision is enclosed. Please direct your questions or comments to Regional Parks Manager Marty Watkins, FWP, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell, MT 59901, or e-mail mawatkins@mt.gov.

Sincerely,

Jim Satterfield
Regional Supervisor

/ni
Enclosure

*E-mailed

Record of Decision
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Thompson Chain of Lakes Forestry Project
Environmental Assessment

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

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Description of the Proposed Action:

The goal of the project is to maintain the Thompson Chain of Lakes property over time for safe public use, with a forest cover that is healthy and fire and wind resistant. Large, mature trees are desired as the general forest cover over time. Tree crowns and root systems need adequate site resources in order to resist insect and disease attack. Tree crowns that are not touching will have adequate site resources to grow and remain healthy as well as provide a crown-fire-resistant stand. There will be some diversity of tree sizes and ages on the site to provide replacement trees as some large trees die over time. In addition, consideration will be given to thermal cover and habitat for wildlife. A long-term goal is to restore the site to the historic stand structure of large, open, park-like stands dominated by ponderosa pine and western larch, with some Douglas fir. Another issue considered at TCL is site control along main vehicle access points to discourage off-road vehicle use.

The preferred climax species for this site, given topography, elevation, soil type, and moisture requirements, is ponderosa pine. Douglas fir is not the desired climax tree in a public recreation area. Due to their shallow root systems they tend to fall over readily due to the push of winds on the top of the tree. In addition they are not fire or disease resistant. Therefore this project has been designed to remove Douglas fir to allow existing ponderosa pine to grow and remain healthy.

DNRC will manage the timber sales and hire the appropriate contractors to do the work on the FWP-owned sites. Some funding from Lincoln County firewise grants will be available to offset some of the expenses of this project. Firewise grants are federal funding that was made available through the counties to do fuels reduction projects to reduce the probability of catastrophic fire in the urban rural interface. It is anticipated that this project will be revenue neutral, with Units 1-3 earning revenue that will be spent do to the needed work in Unit 4.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposed the following action:

In all Management Units:

Some trees that are appropriate for wildlife will be left as snag trees. Depending on funding available, some dead trees that are large may be topped to reduce wind load and

left as snags. Three to five tons of woody debris per acre will be left on the forest floor in order to provide habitat for small mammals. This debris will be in the 0" to 6" diameter range, with some larger debris left. Best Management Practices will be followed in all treatments. Along roadways some screening will be left to discourage off-road vehicle use. Woody debris will be left in skid trails to discourage vehicle traffic and encourage reclamation of the skid trails. In areas where it is considered appropriate, the contractor will work with the area biologist to leave thermal cover, and also create some openings by scarification, to enhance forage for deer. This treatment will take place in winter to reduce impacts to the land. With ground disturbance, weeds will be encouraged to grow. The areas impacted will be aggressively managed for weed infestations. All areas disturbed will be reseeded with native grasses.

Management Unit 1, Middle Thompson Lake: A thin strip of FWP property exists between private housing on the northern end of Middle Thompson Lake and Highway 2. With the main goal being fire suppression, the recommendation is to harvest approximately 50% of the volume in this area, removing the slash at the time of harvest. A thin buffer would be left unthinned along Highway 2 to provide a visual and noise barrier for the remainder of the property and the adjacent private housing. In total, 24 acres would be thinned.

Management Unit 2, back of Crystal Lake: There are two areas in this 11-acre plot: 6 acres contain a two-story stand with a dense understory, and the remaining 5 acres is a nice stand of mature trees with a scattered dense understory of Douglas fir. This stand is adjacent to private homes along Crystal Lake Road. The main objective of this effort would be fuels reduction. DNRC has recommended that the 6-acre section have approximately 50% of the volume removed, along with the slash. Trees that will be left will be larch and pine that are the healthiest, with the smaller trees being removed. In the remaining 5 acres it is recommended that the area be precommercially thinned to a 12-14' spacing and the slash limbed and lopped. Within 100' of the dirt road and/or property lines, the trees will be spaced to a 10' crown spacing and the slash piled and burned or chipped. This will improve aesthetics and provide a firebreak from a ground fire. The above action will greatly reduce the possibility of a crown fire, reducing fire risk to adjacent homes, while at the same time giving trees the space and nutrients they need to be resistant to disease and infestations. In total, 11 acres would be treated.

Management Unit 3, Crystal Lake by Highway 2: This parcel abuts lakeshore lots on both the southwest and southeast sides. A large development is currently underway on the southeast side around Rainbow Lake. This property is an integral part of any firewise effort to reduce the probability of catastrophic fire in this general area. The property consists of a dense understory of 1-3" Douglas fir with a scattering of merchantable 7-12" overstory. The overstory is generally very poorly formed.

This stand should have the older, poorly formed overstory trees removed. Any ponderosa pine and western larch should be favored as leave trees, and the remaining understory precommercially thinned to a 14' x 14' spacing between trees, with the slash being limbed and lopped to a depth of less than 2'. A 100' perimeter around the stand should be thinned to a wider spacing with at least 10' between crowns. Slash in that area should be piled and burned or chipped.

To benefit wildlife, small openings will be created of between ¼ and ½ acre to accommodate shrub growth. In total, 72 acres would be treated.

Management Unit 4, Upper Thompson: Much of this parcel is lake and riparian area. Approximately 213 acres are forested. While this area is not as critical in fire prevention, fuels and fire reduction are needed. Large stumps indicate this area was logged 80-90 years ago, and much of the unit was precommercially thinned 30-35 years ago. Most of the thinned stand is around 50 years old.

Douglas fir is the predominant species, with quite a few western larch. More lodgepole occurs in the western portion of the stand. There are few ponderosa pine. Throughout the stand there are shade-tolerant Douglas fir that are forming a dense understory. These trees provide ladder fuels and also suppress growth of ponderosa pine. Armillaria root rot, in combination with drought, has claimed many trees in the last few years. There are very few palatable shrubs for big game forage.

The purpose for treating this unit would be to improve wildlife forage, reduce the possibility of crown fires, and remove Douglas fir understory to enable the growth of ponderosa pine and western larch. The recommended treatment is to remove 1.5 MBF of the smaller, poorly formed and slower growing trees of merchantable size. The recommendation is to remove much of the 1-3" Douglas fir, and in some areas pre-commercially thin to a 14' x 14' spacing. Some thickets could be left for hiding and thermal cover. Among the recreation sites along the lakeshore, the recommendation is to remove poorer, merchantable trees and precommercially thin the understory. This could be done in such a manner that the natural feel of the area could be maintained.

To remove the timber in this unit it will be necessary to improve the road that provides access to recreation sites along Upper Thompson Lake. The current road is so rutted and degraded that logging trucks could not use it in its existing condition. The contractor will have to upgrade the existing road in order to gain access for their equipment. The road repair cost will be part of the costs considered in the contract for timber removal.

Public Comment:

FWP and DNRC attended several homeowners association meetings over two years to discuss this project. Notice of the project was put in local newspapers. A 30-day comment period was held, from September 29 through October 31, 2005, and two comments were received supporting the project.

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis in the environmental assessment (EA), I find Alternative 2, to complete the forestry project, to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

The final environmental assessment and the finding of no significant impact (FONSI) may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. Please direct requests and questions to:

Marty Watkins, Regional Parks Manager
Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 752-5501
mawatkins@mt.gov

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this record of decision. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Ave., Helena, MT 59620.

James R. Satterfield, Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Date